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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - SECRETARY RICE TO RUSSIA - LITHUANIA - REGIONAL GEO-STRATEGY MIDDLE EAST - ELECTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA - DEMOCRATIZATION
PARIS - FRIDAY, APRIL 22, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

11. SECRETARY RICE TO RUSSIA - LITHUANIA - REGIONAL GEO-STRATEGY
12. MIDDLE EAST - ELECTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA - DEMOCRATIZATION

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS ARE COVERED IN TODAY'S FRONT PAGES, EDITORIALS AND REPORTS, WITH THE EU CONSTITUTION STILL VERY MUCH IN THE LEAD. RIGHT-OF-CENTER WEEKLY L'EXPRESS PUBLISHES THE LATEST POLL ON VOTER INTENTION, WHICH SHOWS THAT IF THE REFERENDUM WERE CALLED THIS SUNDAY, 58 PERCENT WOULD VOTE 'NO,' UP 5 PERCENTAGE POINTS FROM A SIMILAR POLL IT CONDUCTED TEN DAYS AGO; THE 'YES' DROPS FROM 47 PERCENT TO 42 PERCENT. THE SAME POLL INDICATES THAT CHIRAC ALSO LOST 2 PERCENTAGE POINTS IN SUPPORT, FROM 50 TO 48 PERCENT; PM RAFFARIN DROPPED THREE PERCENTAGE POINTS, FROM 31 TO 28 PERCENT.

IN AN INTERVIEW IN CATHOLIC LA CROIX, THE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER, CONFIRMS PREVIOUS REMARKS FROM FRANCE'S EUROPEAN PARTNERS AND SAYS: "EUROPE NEEDS FRANCE. A 'NO' VOTE WOULD LEAD FRANCE TO LOSE SOME OF ITS INFLUENCE. THE FRENCH ARE FORGETTING THAT FRANCE IS PERCEIVED AS A MODEL. IF THE MODEL IS DISAPPOINTING, THEN THE FEELING OF BITTERNESS IS THAT MUCH DEEPER." IN REGIONAL LES DERNIERES NOUVELLES D'ALSACE, JEAN-CLAUDE KIEFER PENS AN EDITORIAL TITLED "FRENCH AND EUROPEAN CRISIS." "EUROPE ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO THE PREVAILING FUNK. IT IS TRUE, EUROPE NEEDS SERIOUSLY TO BE SHAKEN UP, WHICH ONLY THE CONSTITUTION WILL ALLOW. EXCUSE MY FRENCH, BUT IT REALLY IS TIME TO PUT SOME ORDER IN THIS PIGPEN, PROVIDED WE GIVE OURSELVES THE PROPER TOOLS. BUT NOT BY SAYING 'NO' TO THE CONSTITUTION. NOT BY THROWING THE BABY OUT WITH THE BATH WATER."

SECRETARY RICE'S VISIT TO LITHUANIA IS NOTED IN LE FIGARO AND

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HER COMMENTS ON BELARUS REPORTED, WHILE IN A SEPARATE REPORT LAURE MANDEVILLE ANALYZES THE REGIONAL POWER PLAY IN FORMER SOVIET UNION STATES, INCLUDING IN CONNECTION TO THE GUAAM SUMMIT. (SEE PART C)

LEFT-OF-CENTER LIBERATION DEVOTES AN EDITORIAL COMMENTARY TO YESTERDAY'S MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA, WHICH PATRICK SABATIER CHARACTERIZES AS "A DESERT, BOTH GEOGRAPHICALLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY SPEAKING." (SEE PART C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

SECRETARY RICE TO RUSSIA - LITHUANIA - REGIONAL GEO-STRATEGY

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"RICE DREAMING OF A 'REVOLUTION IN BELARUS'"
RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (04/22): "NO SOONER HER VISIT OVER IN RUSSIA, WHERE SECRETARY RICE TRIED TO CONVINCE PUTIN THAT THE U.S. WAS NOT TRYING TO 'WEAKEN RUSSIA,' THE SECRETARY 'PICKED' ON BELARUS, SAYING THAT 'THE TIME FOR CHANGE HAD COME.' AND THAT LUKASHENKO'S REGIME WAS 'EUROPE'S LAST DICTATORSHIP.' SECRETARY RICE WENT EVEN FURTHER AND MET WITH BELARUS OPPOSITION MEMBERS, WHOSE COURAGE SHE SAID SHE ADMIRED. IF BELARUS WERE TO FALL INTO THE 'ORANGE' CAMP, IT WOULD BE A GEO-STRATEGIC CATASTROPHE FOR MOSCOW, WHICH COULD TRIGGER AN INTERNAL RUSSIAN UPSET. PRESIDENT BUSH HAS JUST SIGNED A 'LAW FOR DEMOCRACY' WHICH ALLOWS WASHINGTON'S FINANCING OF NGOS TASKED WITH DEMOCRATIZING BELARUS."

"STRUCTURE OF NEW INDEPENDENT STATES FALLING APART"
LAURE MANDEVILLE IN RIGHT-OF-CENTER LE FIGARO (04/22): "SINCE THE 'ORANGE REVOLUTION' IN UKRAINE, A GEO-STRATEGIC EARTHQUAKE IS SHAKING THE FORMER SOVIET UNION, RESHAPING THE AREA TO THE DETRIMENT OF RUSSIA'S POSITIONING. PROOF LIES IN THE RECENT INTEREST FOR THE GUAAM SUMMIT. BEHIND THE SUMMIT'S AVOWED PURPOSE, LIES ANOTHER MORE DISCREET PROJECT FOR POLITICAL AND MILITARY COOPERATION. ONE OTHER TOPIC ON THE AGENDA IS THE DESIRE TO TURN THE REGION OF THE BLACK SEA INTO 'A BASIN FOR

DEMOCRACY.' THE AMERICANS, AS THE INFORMAL GODPARENTS OF THE ORGANIZATION, ARE VERY MUCH PRESENT BEHIND THE SCENE. THE CHAIN REACTION VELVET REVOLUTIONS IN THE REGION WORK IN FAVOR OF WASHINGTON'S AMBITIONS IN EURASIA. EVEN IF IT WOULD BE GOING TOO FAR TO SAY THAT THESE COUNTRIES ARE ONLY PUPPETS IN WASHINGTON'S HANDS. MEANWHILE, FACED WITH THIS UNPRECEDENTED GEO-STRATEGIC REBELLION IN WHAT RUSSIA CONSIDERS TO BE ITS HOME GROUND, MOSCOW IS AT A COMPLETE LOSS. THE NIS, BUILT ON THE RUINS ON THE FORMER SOVIET UNION IS, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, CLINICALLY DEAD."

MIDDLE EAST - ELECTIONS IN SAUDI ARABIA - DEMOCRATIZATION

"OASIS"

PATRICK SABATIER IN LEFT-OFF-CENTER LIBERATION (04/22):
"GEOGRAPHICALLY AND DEMOCRATICALLY SPEAKING, SAUDI ARABIA IS A DESERT. AFTER 9/11, THE COUNTRY WAS REVEALED TO BE A NEST FOR GLOBAL ISLAMIC TERRORISM, AS SYMBOLIZED BY BIN LADEN. IN THIS CONTEXT, A SECRET BALLOT ELECTION IS A REMARKABLE EVENT., EVEN IF THE IMPACT WILL BE LIMITED, BECAUSE WOMEN WERE EXCLUDED FROM IT. THE KINGDOM HAS IN FACT EMBARKED ON A COSMETIC REFORM, MORE THAN ON DEMOCRATIZATION. THE ROYAL FAMILY HAS FINALLY UNDERSTOOD THE DEADLY THREAT OF DOING NOTHING. THE U.S., ITS TRADITIONAL ALLY, HAS MADE THE ISSUE OF DEMOCRATIZING THE MIDDLE EAST AN IMPERATIVE FOR SECURITY. SAUDI ARABIA'S CAUTIOUS ELECTORAL STEP GOES HAND IN HAND WITH A FAULTLESS OPERATION OF REPRISAL AGAINST ISLAMIC TERRORISTS WHO WANT TO TOPPLE A REGIME, WHICH IN THEIR EYES, IS TOO PRO-WEST. YET THOSE WHO ARE WINNING THE ELECTION ARE ISLAMIC CANDIDATES. THIS POLITICAL ISLAMISM IS ALSO FEEDING ON A REJECTION OF THE WEST AND ITS INFLUENCE. WHETHER TERRORIST OR POLITICAL, THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT, IN SAUDI ARABIA AS IN OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES, SEEMS TO BE THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE TO THE PRESENT REGIME. THIS IS THE REAL CHALLENGE FACING WHAT SOME HAVE BEEN CALLING THE 'ARAB SPRING.' IT CAN LEAD TO AN OASIS OF DEMOCRACY OR A SEASON IN HELL, LIKE IN ALGERIA." WOLFF